DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 280 001 CS 008 710

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TITLE Pre-Freshman College Students Share Their Views on Reading.
PUB DATE [86]
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Environment; College Students; Educationally Disadvantaged; Higher Education; Public Opinion; *Reading Attitudes; Reading Instruction; *Reading Research; Recreational Reading; *Remedial Reading; Student Attitudes; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

A study investigated how pre-college students enrolled in a summer remedial reading program felt about reading. Subjects, 170 students recently accepted for admission to a large urban university system, were asked their views on (1) reading, (2) school and education, (3) reading instruction, (4) difficulty and enjoyment of reading, and (5) reading and careers. Results indicated that the students viewed reading as an important skill in society and one that helped to improve a person's standard of living. Other responses revealed that not much emphasis had been placed on individualization or small group instruction in secondary school reading programs, and that most subjects had not been encouraged to read very much beyond their textbooks. (Tables of data are included.) (NKA)

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PRE-FRESHMAN YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS SHARE THEIR VIEWS ON READING

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Pre-Freshman Year College Students

Share Their Views on Reading

Abstract

This study was undertaken to determine how pre-freshman year college students enrolled in remedial reading programs felt about reading. The subjects were 170 individuals recently accepted for admission to a large urban university system. By means of a questionnaire, subjects were asked to give their views toward reading and reading instruction. In general, the respondents' views toward reading were very positive. Reading was seen as being a very important skill in the society and one which helped to improve an individual's standards of living. Other responses of the pre-freshman revealed that not much emphasis had been placed on individualization or small group instruction in reading programs in their previous schooling. Moreover, many of the individuals indicated that they had not been encouraged to read to any extent from non-textbook literature.

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In order to value reading, an individual must have many satisfying reading experiences. It would be difficult for anyone to become a facile reader without valuing reading enough to put forth the time and effort needed to develop and strengthen reading skills. In today's society, the importance of reading sometimes seems to be downgraded by relatively free access individuals have to video recorders, video tapes, televisions, movies, recordings, filmstrips, radios, and other forms of media. Yet, as Lapp and Flood (1983) point out, the habit of reading can contribute to an individual's knowledge of himself or herself and his or her world in a way few other activities can.

How do individuals at the threshold of college studies feel about reading? The literature on reading achievement indicates that students who have high achievement levels in reading usually evidence very positive attitudes towards reading (Burns, Ross, and Roe, 1984). Little, however, is stated about students who are not high reading achievers. The present study was carried out with a special group of individuals, college pre-freshman who were enrolled in summer remedial reading programs.

This study sought to find out what the students thought of reading. With a questionnaire, students were polled with respect to the role and importance of reading in their lives; they were also

questioned concerning their previous experiences with reading instruction and school in general. The respondents were 170 regularly admitted freshmen for the fall semester 1986 in a major urban university system in New York.

Educators are usually quick to offer their views on the nature of reading, reading instruction and school. But, what are the views of an important group of consumers, students who have not adequately mastered the skills of reading as determined by a college entrance reading test? In this report, the prefreshmen were asked to give their opinions. How did the students feel? In general, the data speak for themselves.

In reactions to questions about reading and its significance in their lives, the students seemed to have had a positive view of reading. As shown in Figure 1, 98 percent of the students believed that reading skill improves one's standard of living. Sixty three percent disagreed that reading materials such as books, magazines and newspapers have made the world too complex. On the other hand, sixty-nine percent felt that reading good literature and other printed material would help make the world a better place in which to live.

A strong 88 percent of the students were in favor of spending public money for reading and literacy programs. However, only 63 percent felt that money spent on reading programs has been used wisely. Apparently, a significant number of the students believed that funded reading and literacy programs in the past have not always been as

effective as they could have been.

How might other data be interpreted? From the standpoint of reading as an institution, it seems highly desirable to have the support of the young people of the society, particularly those who evidence some difficulty in reading skill. These students, in general, agreed that reading is relevant to every day life and is useful for solving many of the problems of every day life. Interestingly enough, students remained generally positive toward reading even when given the opportunity to choose other options, such as television, radio, and recordings, for gaining information. Moreover, 71 percent of the students disagreed that too much emphasis is placed on reading in this society.

This positive view of reading is certainly important and should have implications for teaching. The students recognized the usefulness of reading and the relevance of reading to their lives. Perhaps, teachers could design more reading lessons in which students are able to see the usefulness and practicality of reading. More reading to discuss socially relevant issues and to solve problems of personal significance to students might be included in many reading programs.

The questionnaire also asked students to react to statements about school and their desire for education. (See Figure 2.) School was challenging for 93% of the students and 78 percent wanted as much education as they could get. These students, though experiencing some educational and experiential deficits as evidenced by their remedial college placement, wanted to get as much learning as possible. This attitude could be considered a positive predisposition

on the part of the students toward learning. How can teachers capitalize on the positive attitudes of students, capture their interests and motivate them to achieve?

While most of the students found school challenging, in other ways school received mixed reviews. For example, one third of those polled said that there were many things about school they did not like. While these students may want to learn and get an education they may not be greatly in favor of the institution of schooling as it is presently constituted.

In another section of the survey students reported on the methods and materials their schools used in reading instruction. About half of the group reported they often used textbooks, and only half of the students felt that reading lessons had been presented in an interesting manner. There is a vast amount of literature available for children and young people. Experiences with literature can stimulate the imagination and whet the appetite for reading. The use of a variety of reading materials can help young people to develop reading appreciation and lifetime reading habits. On the other hand, too much direct reading instruction and not enough experiences in reading for information and recreation may have a limiting effect on reading development.

Thirty-seven percent of the students indicated that teachers gave special attention to students with reading difficulties and 47 percent reported having been in schools where there were special classes for problem readers. Fifty-seven of the students said, that

remedial reading teachers were available in the schools they attend to help students with reading difficulties. If special assistance in reading was available to the prefreshmen in prior education, perhaps some were not aware of it or were not given the opportunity to take advantage of the service.

The majority of the students appeared not to have been exposed to reading instruction where teachers individualized or grouped for instruction. Only 32 percent indicated that classes were regularly broken into small groups in elementary school for reading instruction, and, 38 percent reported reading instruction to have been individualized based on student needs. However, 30 percent of the students did report participating in elementary/middle school reading laboratories often, and 40 percent reported participation in reading laboratories sometimes.

Apparently, many of the pre-freshman college students were not exposed to varied approaches to reading instruction. Individualization and small group instruction are vehicles for dealing with the diverse needs of students in a classroom. Unless needs are diagnosed and dealt with, many students will move through the educational system with accumulated problems in reading as well as in other subject matter areas. Interestingly, forty percent of the students did attend reading laboratories, but indicated that they did not do so in a regular or consistent manner. It may be possible that for many of the pre-freshmen, regularly planned programs of instruction to address their specific reading needs or problems were not always available to them in earlier schooling.

Students were also asked to react to statements concerning the difficulty of learning to read and concerning enjoyment of reading. (See Figure 4.) It was encouraging to see that most of the pre-freshmen believed that all students can learn to read if properly taught. 77 percent found reading to be enjoyable in school, but only slightly more than half found that reading was taught in an interesting manner in the schools they had attended. Only 16 percent of the students felt that reading was a difficult subject. On this section of survey, students had a generally positive view toward being able to master reading.

As shown in Figure 5, students believed that reading ability is essential to obtaining a good job. However, the students did not feel to any extent that jobs which require a lot of reading are necessarily more interesting than other jobs. A large number of the students said that helping children learn to read would be an interesting way to earn a living, but a relatively small percentage indicated interest in becoming teachers.

What do our college pre-freshmen think of reading? In general there was a positive view of reading. Reading was identified as being a very important skill in the society and it was felt that ability in reading improves one's standard of living. Students did not negate reading in favor of other modes of communication. It seems that the students recognized and acknowledged the fact that they need reading skills in order to live comfortably in the society. Recognition of this fact may be consistent with the fact that these subjects accepted an invitation to participate in a tuition-free program in remedial

reading instruction for the summer of 1986.

In the survey, students saw the relevance of reading in their lives. Perhaps the question which all elementary/middle school teachers should ask is "How can curriculum and instruction be designed to make reading and the teaching of reading in the schools more relevant to the lives of the students?" More reading to solve problems, to find needed information, to pursue areas of interest, and to discuss topics of current interest may be some possible considerations.

Another point worth noting is that many of the students stated that they had not been encouraged to read widely from books other than textbooks while in school. Students need to be encouraged to broaden their reading interests and habits if they are to become skilled readers. Unfortunately, many students may view reading as what takes place each day in school from prescribed textbooks and within prescribed time frames. Educators will have to find ways to motivate young people to acquire the habit of reading widely from varied sources both in and out of the classroom.

In addition to not reading widely, responses were not very favorable concerning having been in classes where special attention was given to reading needs and problems through individualization and small group instruction or through regular attendance in a special reading laboratory. The following are some relevant questions: How can the schools implement reading instruction to best meet the needs of the learner? Can teachers be trained through pre-service and in-service programs to deal with the varied strengths and weaknesses they

will encounter in the classroom? Did many of the students learn reading in essentially traditional ways - basal textbooks, whole group instruction, and directed reading lessons? Have many students missed the wide variety of reading experiences they should have had in elementary and secondary schools?

The students surveyed may be holding a mirror before their educational systems. They may be positive toward reading now, but we cannot take their appreciation for granted. Additional studies should be conducted to determine students' opinions on reading and reading instruction. Perhaps such data will be useful in helping educators to plan more effective programs in reading instruction.

Figure 1

Students Opinions of Reading. (Items ranked in order of positive view of reading).

		Percentage		
		Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
1.	Reading is a very important skill in this society.	98	2	0
2.	Reading improves our standards of living.	95	3	2
3.	Reading is relevant to everyday life.	95	3	2
4.	Money spent on reading and literacy programs is well worth spending.	89	8	3
5.	The need for individuals to rely on reading materials for information does more harm than good.	8	82	10
6.	Reading is useful for solving the problems of everyday life.	77	17	6
7.	Too much emphasis is placed on reading in this society.	14	72	14
8.	The reading of good literature and other printed media will help to make the world a better place in which to live.	69	10	21
9.	People who read well are better off in our society.	67	15	17
10.	Reading should be replaced in large measure by obtaining information from recordings, television, radio and other foms of communication.	24	65	11
11.	Books, magazines, and newspapers have made the world too complex.	15	63	22
12.	Printed information in books, newspapers and magazines cause many of the world's problems.	13	63	24

13.	Public money spent on reading programs in the schools has been used wisely.	63	14	23
14.	Much of the anxiety in modern society is due to infomation and ideas spread through printed materials.	39	36	25

Figure 2

Student Opinions of School and Education.

		Percentage		
		Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
1.	I want to develop greater skill in reading.	100	0	0
2.	I find school challenging.	93	7	0
3.	I generally dislike my school work.	11	80	9
4.	I want as much education as I can get.	78	22	0
5.	I have not found school in the past to be very enjoyable.	1	72	18
6.	There is too much emphasis placed on reading in elementary and intermediate schools.	13	69	27
7.	I usually find school boring	26	64	10
8.	The most enjoyable part of my life has been the time spent in school.	63	21	16
9.	There are many things about school I don't like.	33	53	14
10.	I enjoy everything about school.	52	33	15

Figure 3

Reading Instruction In School

		Percentage		
		Often	Sometimes	Never
1.	I was taught to read with reading textbooks.	52	43	5
2.	In high school, I was encouraged to read widely from books other than school textbooks.	46	43	12
3.	For independent reading in school, I chose reading books that were of interest to me.	63	31	6
4.	Most teachers in elementary school made reading lessons interesting.	52	48	0
5.	I find reading materials in school to be boring.	10	70	20
6.	In elementary school, teachers gave special help to students who had difficulty learning to read.	37	53	10
7.	There were special classes in elementary school students who had difficulty in reading.	47	38	15
8.	In elementary school, remedial reading teacher helped students with reading problems.	57	33	10
9.	In elementary school, my classes were broken up into small groups for reading.	32	40	28
10.	I participated in the reading laboratory in elementary and/ or intermediate school.	30	36	34
11.	My teachers individualized reading lessons in elementary school so that each child in the class received instruction based on his or her needs.	38	40	21

Figure 4

Difficulty and enjoyment of reading.

		Percentage		
		Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
1.	If properly taught, almost all students could learn to read.	85	8	7
2.	Reading is an enjoyable school subject.	77	10	13
3.	Reading as taught in the schools is interesting.	56	21	23
4.	Reading is difficult subject.	24	59	15
5.	Reading is difficult when studying for a test.	29	53	17
6.	Reading is difficult when doing research assignments.	40	44	16
7.	Reading is difficult when it involves answering questions.	50	35	15

Figure 5

Reading and Careers.

		Percentage		
		Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
1.	Helping children learn to read well would be an interesting way to earn a living.	87	5	8
2.	It is important to read well in order to get a good job.	85	5	10
3.	Most jobs require the ability to read.	76	23	2

Reading and Careers - continued.

		Percentage		
		Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
4.	People who work in situations where they are required to do a lot of reading usually have more interesting jobs.	59	21	20
5.	I would like to become a teacher.	29	50	21
6.	I would like to become a reading teacher.	25	47	27

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